



**Senate Committee on Education
March 13, 2013
Testimony on the Michigan Merit Curriculum
Chris Fisher**

Good afternoon Chairman Pavlov and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Chris Fisher and I am with Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) of Michigan. We are here today to discuss some of what we do, and why the Michigan Merit Curriculum should be amended to allow for more flexibility.

ABC is a statewide trade association working in partnership with regional chapters representing contractors, suppliers and related firms that perform commercial and industrial construction work throughout our state. ABC also provides apprenticeship and craft training throughout Michigan and across the United States. In fact, tens of thousands of apprentices and craft students train in more than 20 construction crafts through our various programs.

Here in Michigan, ABC also has educational partnerships with Community Colleges, M-TEC Centers, the Veteran's Administration, Michigan Works, high schools and major Michigan employers who depend on a highly skilled and educated workforce such as Dow Chemical. Above all else, however, we mostly work directly with construction employers to help fill their need for a highly skilled workforce in our state.

Indeed, it is part of our mission to train tomorrow's workforce to be skilled, motivated, and safety conscious. Through this, become professional craft persons who have a very bright future and career in front of them. Introducing Michigan students to a rewarding and successful construction career is an ongoing challenge that needs to continually be on the forefront. This is where the Michigan Merit curriculum comes into play for employers.

Simply put, vocational education and CET opportunities in high school prepare kids for a skilled trades career that is in high demand. However, employers we work with believe that Michigan needs to do a better job at not only offering plenty of college prep options, but also offering skilled trades, vocational and tech prep options as well. Because of this we advocate improving Michigan's high

school graduation requirements to more easily allow students to pursue a technical or trade-oriented career path. Doing this is essential to ensuring that schools are preparing kids for many needed career options.

Unfortunately, the current Michigan Merit Curriculum downplays high school Career and Technical Education at a time when demand for skilled construction workers is increasing. We are here today from the real world and to report back that we are not doing enough as a state and to make the point that our current high school graduation requirements are not flexible enough.

Technical training in high school allows students to develop marketable job skills that are relevant for today's and tomorrow's job market. The State of Michigan, for example, expects construction trade and technical jobs to expand in the next decade. Likewise, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that half of all jobs available in the next decade will be in such areas.

One thing any contractor will eagerly explain is that a construction career is challenging, well paid, highly skilled and in demand. Yet, all too often young people are steered away from a construction career in favor of another (and often lower paid) career pathway, or they simply are not able to fit CET classes into their current class schedule because of other graduation requirements. The Michigan Merit Curriculum, we believe, is a contributing factor to this trend.

Of course, classes that prepare kids to pursue four-year colleges and universities are certainly needed in a knowledge-based job market, but they are no more relevant, rigorous or necessary than high school classes that prepare them for a career in the building or technical trades, manufacturing, agriculture other professions. We agree that high standards are needed for Michigan students, but we urge the Legislature to avoid a "one size fits all" approach and instead advocate fine-tuning graduation requirements to help a larger percentage of students succeed. After all, Algebra II, or advanced foreign language mandates do not have an educational monopoly on rigor and relevance any more than other crucial curriculum options.

Now is the time to finish the job by ensuring all students have access to a high school education that will prepare them for Michigan's new economy. Good careers and a strong economy depend upon it. So do our students.